



“A book is not like any other commodity”

A qualitative study on Swedish
bookfluencers, labour, and
aspirations.

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on bookfluencers – content creators that create content about books and reading. The study explores how they perceive the gifted books they receive from book publishers and other actors, which they are expected to create content about – often unpaid. The aim of the thesis is to investigate the aspirations behind bookfluencers’ content about gifted books and their experiences of reading them. Furthermore, it explores unpaid labour on social media platforms and attachment to art as an aspiration. How do bookfluencers on social media differ from literary critics in traditional media? The study’s methodology is semi-structured interviews with 10 Swedish bookfluencers. The theoretical framework consists of the concepts of “affective labor” (Hardt, 1999, p. 89; Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108), “aspirational labour” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443), “attunement” (Felski, 2020, p. 41) and “work-net” (Felski, 2020, p. 144). The analysis emphasizes on the labour behind creating content about gifted books, how bookfluencers position themselves and their content in relation to literary criticism, and the processes of attunement to books that they are gifted. Main findings are that seeing reading as an aspiration behind content gives bookfluencers a certain power to negotiate, despite collaborators’ demands. Defining themselves as book recommenders rather than literary critics may imply other expectations on their labour. Further, expectations from collaborators can affect bookfluencers’ reading experiences: the need to adapt their content to the book market can be seen as a form of affective labour. In the last section, the thesis discusses different processes that affect the reading experience of a gifted book, and how bookfluencers imagine getting paid for their work in the future. It problematizes how social media platforms do not pay their content creators. Thus, possible future research topics can explore bookfluencers’ relations to social media platforms and book streaming platforms further.

Key words: bookfluencers, book content, aspirational labour, affective labour, gifted books, gifted products, gifted content, social media marketing, attunement, work-net

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1 Introduction

Reading can be seen as a solitary activity. But I argue that this does not need to be true. For example, oral literary tradition or book clubs prove how we long to share stories with others. As a former literature student, I know how life-changing discussions about literature can be. In our modern, digital world, the book community online is one of those spaces where literature can be celebrated together.

The content creators that share their reading can be called bookfluencers (book + influencer). On blogs, social media platforms or podcasts bookfluencers inspire other people to read books. Book publishers and other actors from the literary field have realized that bookfluencers have an influence on their audience's consumption of books (Kalpaxis, 2020; Hue, 2021; Stewart, 2021). Thus, book publishers send new books to bookfluencers, for the content creators to create content about the literature (Kalpaxis, 2020). Often, the labour behind creating content about these books is just compensated by the gifted book itself (Pope, 2019). This study focuses on what I call *gifted books*, which I define as both review copies and spontaneous gifts from book publishers.

I want to explore how bookfluencers perceive the labour behind creating content about gifted books. Traditional literary criticism in the press has been financially compensated by a wage from an employer, while content creation about books is often not. How do these different forms differ from each other? Are there certain aspirations that motivate bookfluencers to work for free? How can being gifted a book affect the reading experience? From literary critics to bookfluencers: this thesis investigates the shift between traditional media production and social media production and how it affects media producers' experiences of works of art – which clearly situates the study in media and communication studies.

The chosen method for the study is semi-structured interviews with 10 Swedish bookfluencers, where we discuss their relation to gifted literature and how they perceive being bookfluencers. The theoretical framework of the study consists of two different branches. The first branch focuses on labour. “*Affective labor*” (Hardt, 1999, p. 89; Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108) and “*aspirational labour*” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443) are two concepts related to labour. Affective labour describes a form of labour that manipulates affects, for example service work. Duffy's (2020) newer concept of aspirational labour

has similarities with affective labour, but also describes a labour that is done with an aspiration of gaining something. She exemplifies with beauty influencers' aspirations to one day get economic or social capital for their work. These two concepts are used to create an understanding of how the bookfluencer's content creation is a form of labour, and what the bookfluencers' aspirations behind this labour are – as the work often is unpaid. The second branch connects to these forms of aspirations, as a clear aspiration for bookfluencers creating content is the attachment to literature and to share it with others. Thus, the other part of my theoretical framework is about art and attachment – and Rita Felski's (2020) concepts of "*attunement*" (p. 41) and "*work-net*" (p. 144). Attunement describes how we gain interest in a work of art, while work-net describes all the different processes around a work of art which can affect how we experience it. Felski claims that there is much more to how we experience works of art, than just the artwork itself, for example our background or personal experiences. Or, as I state, if a book was gifted by a publishing company – which is the experience that this study explores.

The background section (chapter 2) of the study contextualizes influencer marketing, bookfluencers, discussions about bookfluencers in Swedish media, and what a review copy is. Chapter 3 is a literature review of the concept of the gift, media production and the shift to social media and increased audience participation, influencer marketing and gifted products, and book content production on social media. The last part of this section also describes how my study contributes to the field of media and communication studies. The following chapters describe my theory, method, and ethical framework. My analysis is divided into four sections. The first section (7.1) focuses on the labour of the gifted book, the second part (7.2) focuses on how bookfluencers define themselves and their content in relation to literary criticism, the third section (7.3) is about how bookfluencers experience reading gifted books and the attunement to them. The fourth section (7.4) compiles the main findings. The last chapter (8 Discussion and concluding remarks) discusses the analysis in three different parts. The first section (8.1) focuses on the gifted book as a work-net, the second (8.2) discusses the future of bookfluencers and if they could be paid for their labour, the last section (8.3) describes possible future research topics that connects to the study.

1.1 Research questions

The aim of the thesis is to investigate what motivates bookfluencers to create content about books and how they experience being gifted books by publishers, and the aesthetic processes behind reading these books. I want to explore unpaid labour on social media platforms, and the motivations behind it – and attachment to art as an aspiration.

My research questions are:

1. How do bookfluencers position themselves and their reading in relation to
 - the idea of the book critic?
 - the labour of creating social media content about books?
2. What are the aspirations behind receiving and creating social media content about gifted books?

2 Background

Bookfluencers can be seen as an obscure topic for the uninitiated. This section covers the context in which the study emerges. The contextualisation connects the topic to a broader picture and current debate. Firstly, I describe the notion of influencer marketing, which bookfluencers are a part of. Secondly, I define what a bookfluencer is. I describe which platforms they use and how they stand out in relation to other forms of influencers. The next section describes a debate in Swedish media in 2020 about the bookfluencer's role – which identifies important questions about the expectations behind bookfluencers' labour of creating content, when the labour is unpaid and paid with a book. Lastly, I describe the term review copy – which is not a new phenomenon – and how it has changed during the recent years.

2.1 Influencer marketing

This study will focus on influencers in the book community online and their opinions of being used as a part of book publishing companies' – or other collaborators' – marketing of books. The concept of the influencer has been common for a couple of years now. This section will describe what an influencer is and define influencer marketing.

What is influencer marketing? T. Bettina Cornwell and Helen Katz (2021) argue in their book on the topic that influencer marketing is “marketing activities [...] that employ personas” (p. 7). According to the writers, seeing influencers as forms of personas highlights how they can be seen to curate how they present themselves for their audience. The word persona also highlights how an influencer must not be a person, but can be an animal or a cartoon, for example. An influencer may be closely related to a real person, or something or someone completely made up – and everything in between. Cornwell and Katz also emphasize how the definition of an influencer must not depend on how large their audience is, but their ability to influence their audience.

In a broad definition, influencers can be seen as parts of our everyday lives, both offline and online. According to Paris Martineau (2019), the initial idea of the word influencer describes someone who can influence other people – but she claims that in later years it has been seen in relation to consumer culture and a tech-oriented world. It can be seen as we often relate influencers as personas on social media platforms that have an influence on our consumption habits. Cornwell and Katz (2021) emphasize how word of mouth and recommendations from celebrities have been a way for companies to successfully reach consumers, as a form of external motivation. Furthermore, they state that it is known by brands how one person having a good experience with a brand can make it grow – through the recommendations they make to other people. They argue that influencer marketing is interconnected to this, as it utilizes the same power of a shared opinion of a product.

Influencers have a power to influence their audiences which attracts brands to wanting to work with them. Pallavi Srivastava (2014) highlights how the influencer’s credibility is what brands are interested in, as recommendations on social media are seen as more likely to target the audience than more traditional ways of marketing, like ads or banners. Martineau (2019) claims that the growth of influencer marketing as an industry has resulted in that influencers are more aware of their worth in relation to brands. She argues that the power dynamics have changed in the way that brands are more in need of influencers and the influencers may charge more for each post.

However, this development is not as visible regarding the book community's influencers, which will be described in the following section.

2.2 The bookfluencer and their platforms

The study focuses on the phenomenon of bookfluencers. As stated in the previous section, I see differences in bookfluencers not being as prone to get financially compensated for their content. This section describes what a bookfluencer is, how they emerged, and their different platforms.

From the literary blogs to social media platforms – the wish to share experiences and opinions of books has been present since the early 2000's Internet days. Jeff Gomez (2005) states that the literary blogs emerged for the same reason as book clubs were popular in the 90's: they encouraged discussion on everything bookish within a community of book lovers. Meredith Nelson (2006) even defines literary bloggers as "influencers" (p. 6f) in her early article. She remarks that book bloggers can reach the readers in new ways.

The different parts of the book community on different social media platforms define themselves by compound words of book and the name of the social media platform like: Bookstagram (Instagram), BookTube (YouTube) and BookTok (TikTok). I use the word bookfluencers (book + influencers) to describe the influencers that focus on content about literature.

Even if bookfluencers can be on different platforms, all with different affordances, a common idea is how they have influence on the book industry. However, Shelby Pope (2019) states that in contrast to other influencers on Instagram, bookfluencers do not get paid for making content – except in the books that they are sent. She argues that bookstagrammers differ from other influencers in the way that their actual lives are similar to what they post online. Vicky Kalpaxis (2020) argues that the book publishing industry uses bookfluencers on YouTube as a marketing tactic – they give the influencers copies of new books before they are officially published to hype them up before they hit the bookstores. It shows that publishing companies recognize bookfluencers' influence and use it in their marketing.

BookTok is the latest new book community that has gained great popularity. Angelina Hue (2021) writes that the BookTok community has a large impact on the publishing industry, where book recommendations can affect the demand for particular books. The article connects to the idea of the industry of physical books as struggling and threatened by new media. But Hue argues that social media can inspire people to read and buy books. Sophia Stewart (2021) writes that the marketing of books on TikTok can be seen to have a form of grassroots nature. The younger generation is more influenced to buy a product if they know that the person recommending it is not financially compensated. It inspires the publicists to work more organically – and it is important to be aware of the differing tastes of the influencers when sending them books, to create a good relationship. It can be seen as connecting to the idea of the power of word of mouth and sharing a personal opinion, that was described in section 2.1.

The idea that a bookfluencer does not need to be compensated for creating content about books is what this study explores, as I investigate the topic from the social media producer's perspective. The following section describes a discussion about bookfluencers' labour and their role in Swedish media.

2.3 The role of bookfluencers: a debate in Swedish media in 2020

Writing about books on social media has gained popularity in Sweden and is a new channel for reaching out with new books for authors and book publishers. The relation between bookfluencers, authors and book publishing companies – and the bookfluencer's role – was the focus of a brief debate in Göteborgs-Posten in 2020.

The debate can be seen to start from the content producer's perspective. In Celia Svedhem's (2020) article, Swedish bookfluencers give their accounts of unpleasant encounters with authors and book publishing companies. They are told not to post negative reviews and that they do not have enough expertise. Some bookfluencers even claim that they are threatened or bribed into deleting negative reviews. Svedhem argues that the book publishing companies tend to perceive bookfluencers differently than book critics. She claims that bookfluencers are seen as an easy way of marketing books:

bookfluencers should be happy for the review copies they receive and post positively about them. Svedhem argues that an open conversation where bookfluencers are not silenced is favourable for the cultural scene, as it enables a broader representation of different interpretations of books.

The other contributor to the debate can be seen to focus more on the publisher's perspective and bookfluencers' obligations when receiving a book. The author Johanna Schreiber (2020) responds to Svedhem's article and states that she and her colleagues are appalled by the examples of how book publishers and authors mistreat bookfluencers. However, she has not heard of any of these negative encounters before by her colleagues from the large publishing companies Bonnierförlagen and Norstedts. Instead, she experiences that her colleagues appreciate nuanced reviews. She argues that there is an increased need to use social media in the marketing of books, as book criticism is deprioritized in journalism today. According to Schreiber, the bookfluencers should take their role seriously. The texts should be reviews, not just book recommendations. She argues that if the bookfluencers only write a sentence about if they liked or disliked the book, then they should go to the library to get their free books instead.

The expectations on bookfluencers are further studied in this thesis. How do bookfluencers experience their role in relation to gifted books? The definitions of review and recommendation are also explored.

2.4 Review copies

I choose to define books that bookfluencers receive from the book publishing companies as gifted books. This definition includes both spontaneous dispatches and review copies. Review copies usually entail some dialogue between the receiver and the giver – with the expectation that the receiver will write some kind of review about the book they receive. Exploring the possible expectations behind a review copy can be a way of investigating how bookfluencers perceive their role in relation to literary criticism.

Review copies are not a new phenomenon, but describe copies of books (or other artefacts, like music albums) that are handed out to for example literary critics on newspapers in exchange of a review. Lennart Nylund (2002) writes that review copies come with a stamp, which helps them to not be exchanged with another book in the bookstores. However, the practice of selling these books to second-hand bookshops is common, but not appreciated by the book publishing companies. Thus, the purpose of review copies is not to be seen as a possible income for the receiver.

Advance review copies (ARCs) are copies of books that are not yet published. Weronika Strzyżyńska (2021) describes how ARCs can be a status symbol and that the demand for them has increased since the era of book influencing started. Selling these copies is not allowed, but Strzyżyńska states that the status connected to these copies still makes people try to sell them on marketplaces. Amazon has taken responsibility to stop this practice, but people who try to sell ARCs on eBay do not face any consequences. According to Strzyżyńska article, publicists put more effort in making the ARCs look aesthetically pleasing now, since it is more important in the new media landscape to make them shareable and to catch attention. The emphasis on the visual element of these review copies may be seen as a shift – is the expectation to actually read the book before posting about it as prominent as it was in literary criticism?

As described, there is an idea that the receiver of the review copy should not try to sell and make a profit of it. Moreover, what makes review copies interesting in the new media landscape is that they come with expectations from the book publishing companies. What are these expectations towards bookfluencers? Do bookfluencers feel like they need to meet these expectations? While earlier forms of book reviewers were hired by newspapers or other forms of traditional media platforms, bookfluencers have their accounts on social media platforms. The early book reviewers were paid by their platforms, but bookfluencers cannot expect the same – even if their content plays a part in bringing an audience to the platforms. We can conclude that the conditions for being a book reviewer have changed – can book publishing companies still expect bookfluencers to write a full review of a book, while not being paid more for their work than just the book they receive?

3 Literature review

Although my topic can be considered niche, intersections of it have already been explored in different ways in previous research. I identify four important categories in my literature review. First, it is important to describe gifts more conceptually, and I connect this to anthropology studies by Marcel Mauss (1925/2016) – in order to create an understanding of how giving and receiving gifts carries meaning in our society. The second section situates the study within media production studies and describes how participation of audiences has become more valued due to the shift to social media. The third section focuses on influencer marketing and gifted products, which is situated and researched mostly in relation to beauty influencers. The fourth section navigates through previous research about book content production on social media. The last section of the literature review identifies the research gaps and my contribution to the field of media and communication studies.

3.1 The gift as a concept

What moral processes are behind the practice of giving and receiving gifts? This topic is explored in Marcel Mauss' influential essay *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* from 1925. The essay investigates gift giving in archaic cultures and compares the practices with modern Western culture. Mauss (1925/2016) claims that modern Western society is not just market ethics – we still have similar moral systems connected to gift giving, like in the archaic cultures. An important conclusion that Mauss makes is that gift giving can be a way of claiming superiority, and receiving in turn can position one as subordinate, if the gift is not returned. Because of this, Mauss criticizes charity – the relation becomes uneven when one of the parts just receives. One could say that the idea of socialism and the welfare state is instead to let everyone both give and receive, to make the hierarchy more even.

In relation to my topic, I recognize how Mauss' theories on gift giving relate to bookfluencers' willingness to reciprocate the gifts of the books from book publishers, despite not being paid. To create content about the received book can be a way of not positioning themselves as morally subordinate. If the content (an immaterial form of a gift) is of good quality, the book publishers also might feel the need to reciprocate this gift by sending the bookfluencer books that give a higher value to the bookfluencer, that

are curated to fit their tastes or are personalized with greetings from the author. The thesis highlights how immaterial goods can also be a form of gift, and how it is important to explore gift giving in relation to social media and influencer marketing.

3.2 Media production, social media, and participation

The study explores bookfluencers' content creation on social media. Media production on social media is thus a relevant topic to elaborate on further – to investigate how media production has changed with social media and how it affects bookfluencers' roles. The thesis can be seen as situated in the field of media production studies.

How can we understand bookfluencers' practices on social media, where they engage in other people's works and share a part in the marketing of them? A possible lens could be through the concept of "participatory culture" (Shirky, 2010, 19). Clay Shirky (2010) describes the term as how we all can participate in creating culture, not just consuming it. In relation to bookfluencers, we can see how they are not just reading books but are a part in creating the world around the books with their content. Furthermore, Shirky also elaborates on amateurism, where being an "amateur" (p. 83) does not just imply that your skills are not perfected in the way that a professional's skills are, but that your motivation is the love for what you are doing. The views on being an amateur have been that it does not mean to be publicly visible with the practice, but Shirky argues that social media changes this – the amateurs are now public with their practices. Thus, professionals and amateurs cannot be separated by if they share their practices publicly anymore. One could describe the bookfluencer community as a form of amateurs, motivated by their interest in books, while literary critics can be seen as professionals. But this form of division can be problematized: are bookfluencers not as competent as literary critics? Are not literary critics also motivated by their love of reading? Is the fact that bookfluencers do what they love an acceptable reason for not getting paid for it? One could argue that social media affects media production in the way that more people have the opportunity to publicly participate in the cultural discussion, but it also invites new questions of compensation for work and possible exploitation of engaged content creators. Thus, my study is relevant in how it investigates the labour behind creating social media content and how bookfluencers perceive it. Exploring their role in relation to literary critics can be a way of further examining the shift between traditional

media and social media, and its consequences on society from a media production perspective.

Sylvia Chan-Olmsted and Rang Wang (2020) also highlight how audiences are more included in the media production due to the shift to social media: “Value is no longer created by companies alone, but co-created by companies and consumers” (p. 143). It can be seen in relation to the publishing companies, and how they use bookfluencers in their marketing – who are also consumers of their books. Chan-Olmsted and Wang describe influencers as a way for brands to empower audiences, and in turn generate value to products. It emphasizes how the content generated by bookfluencers can have positive effects on the marketing of books. However, the work is often unpaid, which makes it important to explore the aspirations behind creating content. In a larger political perspective, the study also focuses on how the labour of individuals can be exploited by companies on social media. Quintin Bradley (2012) claims that unpaid labour enables the neoliberal system. Thus, it is important to study unpaid labour in social media production as it may affect our society as a whole.

3.3 Influencer marketing and gifted products

The question of what can be expected from a receiver of a gift is highly relevant in relation to the gifts that influencers receive from brands. The brands may have spoken or unspoken expectations of the content creator to present the product in their content, despite that the influencer is not getting financially compensated for it.

Influencers need to stay aware about what is expected of them, in order to stay relevant – even if their work is unpaid. Brooke Erin Duffy (2017) describes how content creators can be seen as a part of a “creative precariat” (p. 165) as they are not always paid for their work, except in visibility: their working conditions can be seen as precarious. Influencers adapt their content – and in turn themselves – to be more representative for brands. Duffy uses the term “entrepreneurial brand devotion” (p. 182) to describe how influencers present themselves in a way to fit the brands they want to work with. It means that the content creators may work for free for brands in order to gain visibility and social capital. Duffy defines the situation as ironic, as the labour of the content creator instead becomes invisible, when they are not getting paid for their work. It is

also important for audiences that the sponsored content feels authentic and some of Duffy's respondents state that they have been criticized for just doing it for money. Duffy problematizes this in relation to the work of influencers as something highly gendered, where women are criticized for monetizing their content and are encouraged to work for free.

The relation between a giver and receiver of gifted products can be seen as a power imbalance, if the products influencers receive are products they could not afford on their own. An important point, according to Emily Hund and Lee McGuigan (2019) is that free products from companies can be a way for influencers to show the lifestyle that they aspire to have to their followers – which in turn aspire to be like them. One of Hund's and McGuigan's respondents was gifted furniture by a company, and she argues that she would not have afforded it on her own. She sees how the gift will make great content. It can be seen as the influencer aspiring to be someone else, while also influencing the followers to be like them – and that their lifestyle is consumable. Hund and McGuigan introduce the concept of a “shoppable life” (p. 20) which describes how social media influencers practice a form of performativity in which they show how certain lifestyles can be consumed.

What can be seen in relation to bookfluencers is that the concept of “entrepreneurial brand devotion” (Duffy, 2017, p.182) can be translated to a devotion of certain book publishing companies. It might mean to just post more content about books from the publisher, to try to always meet their expectation, or focusing on certain genres. The term is one of the characteristics of the concept of “aspirational labour” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443) and will be a part of the theoretical framework described in chapter 4 of the thesis. Furthermore, the concept of a “shoppable life” (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 20) can be connected to the simple conclusion that new copies of books are not cheap, and how being gifted books enables a lifestyle of being able to read many books. I also want to highlight how bookfluencers may sell the idea of a life where you should always keep up with the trends, as the gifted books in majority are new books. I argue that the emphasis on new books might make it less likely for followers to be influenced to borrow books from the library: where the book might not be available yet or the popularity of new books might result in longer queues for the copy of it. The emphasis on newness is explored further in the analysis.

3.4 Book content production on social media

As stated, my study focuses on book content from a media production perspective, as I interview bookfluencers about their experiences of creating content and their relation to publishers and authors. The perspective has already been explored to some extent in previous studies.

The practice of publishers, or other actors, giving books to bookfluencers can be seen as a collaboration. José M. Tomasena (2019) elaborates on how booktubers navigate their collaborations with other actors in the literary field, which is the study that I have found closest to my research topic. Important findings are that booktubers seldom have enough followers to profit economically from their content, unlike other niches on YouTube (for example gamer or beauty YouTubers). Instead, Tomasena describes that the group accumulates social and symbolic capital with their content – and how collaborations entail increased reputation and opportunities to win other positions in the industry. Booktubers inherit some influence in relation to book publishers regarding their social capital, as the physical book has been going through a crisis and book publishers are eager to find new target audiences. Content creators may be a bridge to these new audiences. However, Tomasena defines booktubers' content creation as a form of unpaid labour. The gifts booktubers receive may seem to be favourable for them in relation to social capital, but they may also entail the risk of losing autonomy over their content creation. Lastly, the article points out how social media platforms and their algorithms may support and reinforce what is already mainstream culture, and how more obscure books and ideas might go unnoticed. It may affect culture to be more homogenous and that we miss out on revolutionary books. My research topic is similar to Tomasena's. However, my topic uses another theoretical framework with more focus on the labour of writing about gifts and how gifts affect the aesthetic experiences of bookfluencers. It is also important to point out that Tomasena's demography is different than mine: I interview Swedish bookfluencers from an array of different platforms, while Tomasena focuses on Spanish speaking booktubers.

Another article about book content from the perspective of media production is Nataly Guíñez-Cabrera and Katherine Mansilla-Obando's (2022) article about booktokers. The

article explores booktokers' motivations to create content on the platform and it highlights how they are motivated to create content in order to share and discuss reading experiences with others. An interesting aspect is that when their respondents were asked about price value, they did not connect it to the fact that TikTok is free – but that they invest their own time in using the app to create book content. My study also points out how time is inherently essential to reading as an aesthetic experience. Reading takes time – and creating content about reading does so too.

My study also explores the topic of how bookfluencers perceive their content in relation to literary criticism. Similarly, Sonia Parratt-Fernández et al. (2021) focus on how Spanish booktubers position themselves in relation to literary critics. Only 24 % of Parratt-Fernández et al.'s respondents perceived their work on their content as a form of literary criticism, while as much as 92 % saw their assignment as just recommending books. They can even be seen avoiding being considered literary critics, instead they focus on how they encourage reading. Further, 92 % of the respondents' motivations behind creating content is to share the books they have read with others, while just 2 % are motivated to influence others. 29 % are motivated by having a fun experience. An interesting aspect is that the researchers conclude that even though most of the respondents do not see themselves as professionals in the literary field, many of them still end up working in the book industry – for example in publishing. It can be connected to my study's focus on the aspirations behind the content – and if there are possible aspirations to work within the field that motivates bookfluencers' free labour.

My study differs from the previous mentioned studies in the way that I situate the topic of how bookfluencers position themselves in relation to literary criticism and, in turn, in connection to the fact that the traditional media literary critic is paid for their job, while the bookfluencer is not. Thus, my topic has more of a labour perspective than Parratt-Fernández et al.'s (2021) article. Moreover, my perspective does not just stay with the perspective of labour, but also how gifted books – and thus, unpaid labour – also affect the aesthetic experience and the aspirations behind being a bookfluencer.

3.5 My contribution to the field

I situate my study in media production studies. Influencer content production and gifts is an important topic, as I argue that it can be seen in relation to precarious working conditions for people working in the creative industries and media production as a whole. It has relevance in its social and political dimension of exploring unpaid media production on social media, which connects to working conditions within neoliberal governing.

The dimension of bookfluencers is interesting since they generally cannot support themselves on their content. It identifies the question of what their aspirations are to continuously create content. Furthermore, the gifts that they receive creates another factor, how do the gifts intersect with the original aspiration to create content about books? The study explores how capitalist flows may affect aesthetic experiences. It investigates the shift from traditional media (traditional literary criticism) to social media (bookfluencers) and how this affects the working conditions of media producers.

As mentioned, previous studies have been conducted on the topic of bookfluencers. I have identified a gap in previous studies that focuses on gifted products and bookfluencers. This study takes both the unpaid labour of creating content about gifted books, and how being gifted a book affects the aesthetic experience of reading it, in consideration. Further, to my knowledge my study is the first study on the demography of Swedish bookfluencers. My study also focuses on influencers from an array of different platforms.

4 Theory

The thesis explores bookfluencers' labour in relation to the books they receive from book publishers or authors – and their aspirations behind creating content about these books. Thus, the theoretical framework draws on labour and attachments to art. What is common for the theories used is that they are related to affect.

According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), the concept of “affect” (p. 108) differs from emotions in the way that it involves both mind and body. For example, an

affect like joy affects the whole body of an organism and includes a way of thinking and being in the world. I argue that the concept is useful when creating an understanding of what motivates a group to indulge in certain practices. Regarding concepts on labour, I will apply the concept of “*Affective labor*” (Hardt, 1999, p. 89; Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108), but also the more recent “*Aspirational labour*” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443). As the study focuses on a community that cannot be separated from its relation to a certain form of art, literature, I will also use concepts by Rita Felski (2020) in my theoretical framework. She conceptualizes the idea of attachments to works of art and how they may change due to different circumstances in the terms of “*attunement*” (p. 41) and “*work-net*” (p. 144).

4.1 Affective labour

As earlier mentioned, both body and mind are included in the concept of affect. But how is affect connected to labour? According to Michael Hardt (1999), “affective labor” (p. 89) describes labour that creates a community and shared subjectivities. One could argue that this form of labour can be seen as gendered through history, where women has taken more responsibility for childcare, for example. Hardt also points out how feminist scholars have written about these forms of topics before – using another conceptual framework. He states that the concept of affective labour differs in the way that it needs to be situated in relation to capitalism, particularly capitalism in the postmodern society.

Hardt (1999) states that the economic state of the modern society was an industrialized society, while the postmodern society is going through economic “informatization” (p. 90). The service sector grows, and the product of the labour is immaterial. Hardt (1999) exemplifies “immaterial labor” (p. 94) as service, knowledge, or information. The parallel to bookfluencers can be seen in the way that their content spreads information about books. However, what can be seen in relation to the concept of affective labour is how they manage their social role in the book community, their relation to book publishers or authors, their audience and how they front their opinions about the books. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) describe the term as “labor that produces or manipulates affects such as feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion” (p. 108). I argue that the manipulation of affects is a relevant topic for my

study: do bookfluencers adapt their content in any way for the sake of the well-being of book publishers, authors, followers – or themselves? How can the chosen terminology that bookfluencers call their practice manipulate how people view the content and the expectations on the bookfluencer? What are the different expectations on a book review and a book recommendation?

4.2 Aspirational labour

The new media landscape entails new forms of labour. Brooke Erin Duffy (2015) has coined the term “aspirational labour” (p. 443) which describes creative labour that is carried out with the aspiration of a possible reward in social or economic capital. This reward is often distributed unevenly. Duffy argues that this term is highly gendered, as women tend to be in these positions. I argue that this concept fits the study as most of the book community in Sweden consists of women or girls – even though not all my respondents are women – and it may affect the view of the community as a whole.

There are three different characteristics of aspirational labour: “narratives of authenticity and realness; the instrumentality of affective relationships; and entrepreneurial brand devotion” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443). As these characteristics show, aspirational labour can be seen as a form of affective labour, as the characteristics focus on the manipulation of affects to a certain extent.

Duffy’s article has a different demography than my study, as she interviews female media producers in fashion or beauty. The majority of my respondents do not see their content as an opportunity to earn economic capital and do not aspire to be a fulltime influencer. However, the characteristics of aspirational labour still invite a useful conceptual framework – as my study explores bookfluencers’ aspirations to create content about the books they receive from book publishing companies. My study can be seen as a way of expanding the concept in relation to a new demography.

4.3 Art and attachment

How do we find ourselves attached to works of art? Rita Felski (2020) states in her book *Hooked* that a common misconception is to only recognize the attachments experienced by fandoms of popular culture – which are sometimes seen as somewhat

sticky in their subjectiveness. Felski claims that attachments are experienced in relation to all forms of art, including criticism or in the academic world. She recognizes how scholars can be even more attached to the works they analyse, as more is at stake when they arrange their career paths around those works. This contradicts the idea of literary criticism as objective and detached. I will connect this idea to how bookfluencers position themselves in relation to the idea of the book critic.

Felski defines the concept of attachment as a broad set of definitions:

[T]o be attached is to be affected or moved and also to be linked or tied. It denotes passion and compassion – but also an array of ethical, political, intellectual, or other bonds [...] Why do works of art matter? Because they create, or cocreate, enduring ties (Felski, 2020, p. 1)

My study explores the attachments to books that bookfluencers experience and their motivations behind these attachments – especially in relation to books that they are gifted by book publishers.

Felski conceptualizes the different forms of processes behind the attachment to a work of art as “work-nets” (p. 144). It can be both the affordances of the artwork itself, but also how the artwork is co-made, as it can be interpreted from different perspectives or connected to lived experiences of the person that explores it. These ties that create attachment are interesting in relation to gifted books. Does the process of being gifted a book affect the attachment to it? Is the attachment ambivalent?

As the thesis explores the meetings with works of art – I investigate how bookfluencers experience being gifted books – I also choose to apply Felski’s concept of “attunement” (p. 41). She writes that the term describes the notion of starting to be attentive to something and feeling a closeness to it. The work of art starts to evoke something inside of the person experiencing it. In other words, I would describe it as the moment in which you go from unaffectedness to being engaged in an artwork. Attunement is relevant to this study in relation to how bookfluencers’ experiences of books are affected by being gifted the books. Are the bookfluencers able to attune to books, or do experienced expectations from publishers or authors affect the first meeting with it and how the feelings for it proceed?

Felski's theories provide another dimension to the theoretical framework than the theories about labour. As I have already concluded, the aspirations behind being a bookfluencer are different from the beauty influencer: the aspirations can be seen as related to the attachment to the works of literature they create content about. Felski's theory on work-nets shows how these attachments can be changed by a wide set of circumstances. Some examples of the circumstances I explore in this study are the experiences of being gifted a book with a personal greeting from the author – or reading in a higher tempo to create content about a book while it is still new and relevant. Felski's theories show how our experiences of art are not just dependent of the work of art in itself, but also of the world around us and our inner worlds.

5 Methodology

The study investigates how bookfluencers perceive gifted literature and the labour of their content creation. As I am interested in the bookfluencers' own definitions and view on the topic, the chosen method is interviews with 10 bookfluencers. Another possible approach for the study could be to analyse the bookfluencers content. But that would mean that bookfluencers may not fully express how they perceive gifts, as they may feel the surveillance of audience, publishers, or authors. A conversation may entail that they can speak their mind in a more relaxed way. Conducting interviews was also a good way for me to be open to new perspectives – to not have a fixed scheme but to let my curiosity of the topic steer the way. According to Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (2018), being open to new perspectives and how the topic may change is a criterion for conducting well executed interview research.

5.1 Method

As mentioned, conducting interviews is a way of coming close to the research participant's point of view.

The chosen method of the study is semi-structured interviews with Swedish bookfluencers. It means that the interviews will be structured around prepared questions, but that the participants also have the opportunity to talk more extensively about a topic (Collins, 2019). According to Norman Blaikie and Jan Priest (2019),

conducting the qualitative form of interviewing (generally unstructured or semi-structured), is a way to closely investigate how the participants make meaning. The qualitative interview is described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) as a useful method for making an understanding of the research subjects' worldview. A method that focuses on the research subjects' ideas and views is a good choice, as my study concerns bookfluencers' experiences and perceptions.

The approximate time for every interview was 1–2 hours. The respondents were informed to leave a blank space of two hours in their schedules for the interview, to ensure that they would not feel stressed to answer the questions more extensively. I used the video meeting platform Zoom to conduct all the interviews, except one which was on site. The video meeting interviews were recorded through Zoom's recording function. I also made a backup recording of the interviews with the recording function on my smartphone. The interview on site was recorded using Logic Pro X on my computer and the recording function on my smartphone. All my respondents were asked for permission to record the interviews. The recordings are only used in my writing process and are deleted after the thesis is published. I conducted the interviews in Swedish, as I focus on book influencers living in Sweden. I am aware that some meanings may be lost in translation when I quote my respondents in English. I provide my respondents' quotes in both Swedish and translated to English – to be fully transparent with my translation. The list of questions that the respondents were asked is attached to the appendix in chapter 10.1 in both Swedish and English translation.

After the interviews were conducted, my approach was to transcribe them briefly to make a better overview of them. I decided that my analysis would be structured thematically around bookfluencers' labour of the gifted books, how they position and define themselves in relation to literary criticism, and how being gifted a book affect their reading and perception of a book. The process of interpreting my data is further described in chapter 7.

5.2 Research paradigm

The thesis investigates meaning making in a form of social community, through interacting with the research objects. Thus, a fitting research paradigm is interpretivism.

Interpretivism focuses on socially constructed knowledge (Kivjunja & Kuyuni, 2017). I make interpretations of the participants' answers, and I recognize my part of the research, and how I as a scholar contribute to the meaning making: I am not just a “fly on the wall”. I realise that my own participation and my values will affect the results of the study in some way, as the process of conducting an interview is inherently social.

5.3 Sampling

The demography of Swedish book influencers is not extensive, which also affects my sampling. Initially, I reached out to accounts that I was already familiar with and that I knew received gifted products. Further, I also know one of my respondents personally, which will be problematized further in chapter 6 about ethical considerations. This person has some acquaintances in the book influencer community in Sweden and reached out to some of them and asked if they were interested in contributing to my study. One of the respondents were thereby added to my study through them. This means that the sampling was partly a snowball sampling. However, the study mostly used a purposive sampling. I also wrote a post in a Facebook group for Swedish bookfluencers, which resulted in three additional interviews.

The respondents meet these criteria:

1. The respondent have an account on a social media platform that they almost exclusively use to post about books in any way.
2. They have at least 1000 followers on any of their social media platforms. The industry organization for influencers in Sweden, Influencers of Sweden, states that one should have at least 1000 followers to become a member (Influencers of Sweden, 2022). I use this as a guideline for my study.
3. They receive “gifted” products from book publishing companies.

My aim was a broad representation of bookfluencers. An aspect I find important is that my respondents have different favourite genres and are active on different platforms – to make the sample as diverse as possible. I conducted interviews with a total of 10

bookfluencers. Eight of my respondents are female and two of my respondents are male.

Two of my respondents wanted to remain anonymous. Instead, I name them:

- Lina, 25 years old
- Miranda, 37 years old

The other respondents are:

- Johanna, 37 years old (@SincerelyJohanna on YouTube, @johannasbokkonto on Instagram)
- Rasmus, 32 years old (@BockerochBars on YouTube and Instagram, the podcast *Vad vi pratar om när vi pratar om böcker*)
- Pernilla, 45 years old, (@ett_eget_rum on Instagram, the podcast *Vad vi pratar om när vi pratar om böcker*)
- Maria, 36 years old (@mariasbokhylla on Instagram and a blog with the same name)
- Sofia, 44 years old, (@enforbannadpodd on Instagram and a podcast with the same name, @feelbadfia)
- Makz, 32 years old, (@bogbibblan on Instagram and a podcast and website with the same name)
- Agnes, 21 years old (@agnes_lindholm on Instagram, the blog *Agnes bokblogg*)
- Alva, 18 years old (@abookworld on TikTok).

The respondents are book bloggers, bookstagrammers, booktubers, booktokers, and book podcasters. All of the respondents have studied at university, except Alva Eronen, who graduates gymnasiet (Swedish high school) summer 2023. It shows that my sample is quite homogenous in relation to educational level, which can be problematized.

Some of the bookfluencers also have jobs connected to books or the publishing industry, which will be discussed more in section 7.1.

5.4 Limitations

It is important to mention that my study has its limitations. The most prominent limitation is that my respondents are too few to make any general statements for the demography of Swedish bookfluencers as a whole. Thus are my research questions formulated more openly.

The study has a qualitative approach, and my interviews are quite extensive in length. As the study needs to fit the form of a master's thesis, I need to follow the requirements for the length of the thesis and its short time frame. For that reason, I have to demarcate my study, which means that I had to leave out topics that were not relevant to my research questions.

Another aspect is the limitations of the perspective of the study. I focus on bookfluencers' views on gifted books, but publishers' and authors' perspectives can also be relevant for the topic, and I state it as a future research topic in chapter 8.3.

6 Ethical framework

Conducting studies on people and power dynamics requires ethical considerations. Bookfluencers can be vulnerable to a different extent in relation to book publishing companies or other actors.

It is important that my respondents feel comfortable in the different stages of conducting the interview. Initially, in the first contact (email or message on social media), I describe the interview process. I ask them if they agree to record the interview. All my respondents approved. The participants' consent was a prioritized part of the process, and I also emphasized that the respondents could drop out of the study at any time if they wanted to.

I used both video conference, my computer, and my smartphone for the recording. The last option can be problematized in relation to privacy. My supervisor and I discussed the smartphone recording, and we concluded that it was acceptable for the academic level of this thesis, which is master's level. On a PhD level, I would not have had any applications installed on the smartphone I used for recording, or not used this alternative at all – to not risk sharing the data. I will delete the recordings after the publication of the thesis.

Moreover, I ask my respondents about anonymity. Two of my respondents are anonymous, but they are okay with being specific about their age and educational level. However, I want to problematize that the relatively small community of Swedish bookfluencers makes anonymity difficult for some of my respondents, for example Johanna, who works for Swedish television. According to Hilary Collins (2019), some participants can consider to not be anonymized, since they are public figures, or they feel good about owning their story. For that reason, I find it important to let all my respondent make their own choices. However, it is important that I follow up the choice they make, if they may change their mind.

For the respondents that choose to not be anonymous, I still do not include last names. Since all of them do not have them publicly on their social media, I think it is a way to protect their privacy. Their first names and usernames or social media channels are listed in section 5.3. Furthermore, a point that I took into consideration is that interviews can be intimate. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) argue that part of the process of writing an analysis of interviews is to adapt personal statements to be used within the form of something that can be published publicly. I need to take well-founded decisions. Some of my respondents wanted to see their quotes before being published. It is important to be mindful to how the parts I use can affect my participants emotionally or professionally.

Another aspect of analyzing a relatively small demography is the question of representation. I aim for a broad representation of identities, but the representation within the community is an issue that several of my respondents mentioned. If I would continue the project, I would aim for broader representation.

Lastly, an ethical issue with the thesis is that I know one of my respondents personally, which may impact the result of the study to be biased. They also messaged one of the other respondents and asked them if they were interested in being interviewed. However, this other respondent was already on the list of people I wanted to interview and was relevant to my study. All the respondents meet the criteria of my sampling that is described in section 5.3. Another aspect of sampling was my engagement in the bookfluencer group on Facebook. I messaged Sofia, who is one of the admins of the group, if I could join the group and ask for participants for my study. She approved it, and also wanted to be interviewed. The ask for consent is important, as the Facebook group is not an open forum for people outside of the bookfluencer community.

7 Analysis

Initially, after conducting the interviews, I chose to explore their thematic. When I started conducting the interviews, I knew that I wanted to explore bookfluencers' motivations of creating content about gifted books. As the process went on, I saw the connection to unpaid labour, but also that a love for reading was central. It helped me to choose my theories and I interpret my data in relation to them. The three first sections of the analysis chapter each have a theme with several subthemes. The sections are called:

- The labour of bookfluencers and the gifted book
- To recommend or to review?
- Book content and attunement

The first section “The labour of bookfluencers and the gifted book” focuses mainly on the theme *Labour*, with the sub themes *An unclear role as influencers*, *How professional lives affect the aspirations behind content*, *Keeping a good relationship with publishers and other collaborators*, and *The aspiration of reading in relation to labour*. The second section focuses on the theme of *Bookfluencers defining their work*. Subthemes are *Book recommendation or book reviews?*, *Book recommenders or literary critics?*, *Strategies of the gifted book*, *Expectations on bookfluencers*, and *Honesty and the gifted book*. The third section focuses on the theme *Bookfluencers' reading experiences*. Subthemes are *How packaging affects reading experiences of gifted books*, *Temporality*, and *Stress*.

I closely connect my analysis to my study's theoretical framework and the concepts of “*affective labor*” (Hardt, 1999, p. 89; Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108), “*aspirational labour*” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443), “*attunement*” (Felski, 2020, p. 41) and “*work-net*” (Felski, 2020, p. 144), as described in chapter 4.

Finally, the last section is called Main findings, where I summarize the main findings of the previous sections.

7.1 The labour of bookfluencers and the gifted book

In comparison to other forms of influencers, bookfluencers may be seen as not as clear in their own roles yet. The answers were ambiguous when I asked my respondents if they would define themselves as influencers.

A common answer was that they connected the word to a professional status, someone who works with content. They would also relate it to someone who influences other people to consume. Maria and Sofia argued that it is possible to create content about books without buying new books – to post about books borrowed from the library, books they already own or older books bought second hand. Another assumption was that there is an idea in society of what an influencer is, which bookfluencers do not feel like they can relate to:

Många kanske har en bild av att influencers är... ja men de som håller på med skönhet eller mode och är lite så överklass. Men det är klart att det inte behöver vara så, men det är väl nog det som många tänker på när de tänker på just influencers. Men egentligen så är det ju bara en person som har inflytande på människor.

Translation, M.J.: Many people may have the idea that influencers are... yeah that they are doing beauty or fashion and are a bit kind of upper class. But of course it does not have to be like that, but that may be how many perceive influencers. But really it is just a person that has influence on people (Alva, personal communication, March 31, 2023).

Alva makes connections to other forms of content creators that may inherit an entrenched role as influencers. She also relates influencers to a certain social class.

Miranda makes similar connections:

Det känns som att influencers har en helt annan stämpel, en glamorös stämpel än vad jag känner att jag har. Samtidigt så får jag meddelanden dagligen som säger "åh tack för det här tipset" eller "hur kan du tycka om den här boken". Jag får väldigt mycket respons.

Translation, M.J: It feels like influencer has another label to it, a more glamorous label than I feel like I have. But at the same time, I get messages daily saying "oh thank you for the recommendation" or "how can you like this book". I get a lot of response (Miranda, personal communication, February 10, 2023).

What can be discussed from these quotes is how there can be an idea of the influencer as someone who earns money in their profession which helps them live a certain lifestyle. As Duffy (2015) describes in relation to her concept of aspirational labour, influencers often aspire for a glamorous lifestyle – but the reality can be unpaid work.

None of my respondents can live of just their content. The idea of influencers as someone who makes money on content may be a reason why the bookfluencers experienced that they could not relate to the title fully – despite the fact that all of my respondents agreed that they have a certain power to influence others with their content, to varying extent. I connect this to affective labour and its history of unpaid, gendered work. As Hardt (1999) writes, women's affective labour has produced our society. Care work can be seen as a form of unpaid labour that historically has benefitted capitalist society. Silvia Federici (1975) describes how women's housework being unwaged has defined it as nature for women – it undermines how this form of labour supports the capitalist system. It becomes a "labour of love" (p. 2f) and women cannot separate the work from their identity – it is seen as something they naturally love to do and it ignores the many hours of work behind it. As parts of women's unpaid labour is affective labour, this perspective is highly relevant. How women's roles in society have been more precarious can also be seen in relation to Isabell Lorey's (2015) concept of "governmental precarization" (p. 63ff). She argues that precarity has been used as a way of governing in society through different times. The welfare state was governed by safeguarding the white working man while increasing precarity of those that are othered in society, for example women or migrants. On the other hand, Lorey argues that the neoliberal society's method of governing is instead to increase precarity for everyone. This in turn can be seen in relation to how affective labour is increasingly becoming a

part of everyone's life and work now, not just women's, due to the focus on the service sector (Hardt, 1999).

In a similar way as how the capitalist society profited on women's unpaid work, the publishing industry benefits from the affective labour of bookfluencers – as bookfluencers do not get economically compensated for their work. The fact that the manipulation of affects has been seen as a gendered practice historically, may impact the status of service work today. Similar to the beauty influencers Duffy (2015) mentions, a majority of the bookfluencer community in Sweden are women or girls, and also the majority of my sampling. Affective labour as gendered female, and the fact that the demography is also gendered, may be a possible reason why bookfluencers are not paid for their work.

An important aspect of how my respondents balanced their relation to the gifted books, was their aspirations behind their content. This included if they aspired to work in the literary field. Johanna, Maria, Rasmus, and Agnes work with literature professionally outside of their content. Johanna's book blogging and content made her be discovered by Swedish Television and she works as a book recommender on the evening show *Go 'kväll* since 2020. She also has other freelance gigs, like working as a moderator in conversations with authors at for example book fairs. Rasmus' content partially helped him get contacts to work in the publishing industry. Agnes has been working as a book recommender on radio – after a follower of her content recommended her to the channel – but studying at university is her main occupation. Maria freelances as a proof-reader and has self-published a collection of short stories, aside from her other profession.

Maria uses her content partly as a way of reaching out to new clients. Unlike the other participants, she has an overall positive view on reading self-published literature. Self-published authors or authors on hybrid publishing companies are also her clientele when she works as a proof-reader. She aspires to have a good relationship with the self-published authors she reads. But honesty is also important for her: she generally wants

to highlight the positive aspects in her reviews, but she feels like it is important to also be able to be critical. She describes how it is important in relation to her profession, as it shows that she can read books critically and give relevant feedback:

För mig handlar det om att det är ren del av mitt yrke, fast en del av min fritid. Det handlar om att jag måste kunna visa att det här är min professionella åsikt, som någon som arbetar med språk.

Translation: For me, it is about the fact that it is literally a part of my profession, although a part of my freetime. It is about how I need to be able to show my professional opinion, as someone that works with language (Maria, personal communication, March 14, 2023).

Rasmus reasons in a similar way; he argues that honesty and the ability to read critically have been viewed by him as an asset when he realized that he wanted to work in publishing. Honesty can be seen as connected to “*narratives of authenticity and realness*” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443), which is one of the categories of aspirational labour. My respondents’ relation to honesty will be described further in section 7.2. What I want to emphasize, however, is that honesty must not be an obstacle for the aspiration of working with literature – but a way to show competence. The will to brand themselves as competent can be seen in relation to Duffy’s “*entrepreneurial brand devotion*” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443; Duffy, 2017, p. 182), which is a characteristic for aspirational labour.

The aspiration to keep a good relationship with authors and publishers may entail stress and an increased workload for bookfluencers. It connects to entrepreneurial brand devotion in how bookfluencers have to adapt their content in ways that makes collaborators continue their collaboration. Maria’s queue of review copies is of 80 books, and she aspires to read them all, even if some of the books of the queue goes back to 2019. She argues that it is mostly an inner stress to read everything, but she also had encounters with authors who asked her why she had not read their book yet. She describes her inner stress as “*duktig flicka syndromet*” (translation, M.J: “good girl syndrome”, Maria, personal communication, March 14, 2023), which may imply a gendered aspect of a stress to perform well. But she also mentions being motivated by

that the book may be the best book she will ever read, which shows how the reading experience can be an aspiration. Lastly, after reading the book, it may be stressful if the book is not good: How can she formulate herself in the review in a good way, or should she contact the author and tell them that she cannot review it? To be considerate of how authors will receive her reviews entails affective labour.

Both Maria and Lina have contacted authors and said that they cannot review their books, since there are too many errors in the text. It shows the affective labor of bookfluencers to be mindful of the feelings of authors and publishers – while still trying to be experienced as honest by their audience. They manipulate the affects of authors and publishers in the way that they prevent them from feeling shame or anger, by not writing the review. In turn, they try to prevent feelings of distrust from their audience by not posting a positive review about a book they do not like. Another characteristic of aspirational labour is “*the instrumentality of affective relationships*” (Duffy, 2015, p. 443). The affective relationship between influencer, audience and collaborations can become instrumental, especially when there are conflicting values: the bookfluencer should prioritize honesty, but also care for the feelings of authors and publishers.

Johanna experiences another layer of this, since starting to work as a book recommender on television. In her work for SVT, public service, the rule is to not recommend more than one book from each publishing company per episode. On her own initiative, she also tries to fit as many different publishing companies’ books as possible during the season. She works similarly with her social media channels. Another aspect is that she does not post negative reviews of books anymore. She stopped doing this since she wanted to separate her private and professional self. She motivates this as a way of not hurting anyone’s feelings. She argues that she still can work with books that she does not like in private, but as she experiences that other people find it hard to separate her private self and professional self, she chooses to not post negatively about books on her social media. Similarly, Johanna had to separate her Instagram into two different accounts, an account for her book content and a personal account where book publishers and others from the industry cannot follow her. She describes how she had just one

account before, but the demand and surveillance of publishers and authors made her separate her accounts. The account she had has always been locked, but followers from the publishing industry still used her content in their marketing without permission – often taken out of context. The consequence was both to separate the accounts and to be more restrictive in the way she posts. The affective relationship with publishers and authors becomes instrumental, as she must navigate between her professional self and her personal self. Furthermore, the branding of herself as a professional and private self to facilitate the relationship with collaborators can be seen as a form of entrepreneurial brand devotion.

Overall, I interpreted that a secure employment outside of the book industry or viewing posting book content as a hobby was described by 7 out of 10 of my respondents as a way of helping them to negotiate their collaborations with other actors. Sofia, Pernilla, and Miranda stated that they were not interested in making a living on their content at the moment, as they are happy with their professions outside of the industry. Sofia elaborates on how she invested more time and energy on reviewing gifted books when she had her podcast *En förbannad podd*. Now, with her new individual book content, she does not prioritize gifted books the same way. She states that she has other ways to get books that are less stressful. Miranda has children and sees her reading as a way of doing something that is just for herself. She thinks it is important that she prioritizes her joy of reading when creating content. Pernilla does not feel the need to earn money on her content and also problematizes the idea that everything can be profitable:

Speciellt i sociala medier så antingen så är du en vara, alltså typ i dig själv, eller så säljer du någonting, eller så är du konsument.

Translation, M.J. : Especially in social media, you are either a commodity, kind of in your own being, or you sell something, or you are a consumer (Pernilla, personal communication, March 1, 2023).

Pernilla's statement shows a yearning for places where capitalism does not penetrate our interpersonal relationships. The aspiration to read and to share and discuss your readings with others is often the main reason that brings bookfluencers to the platforms.

As mentioned earlier, aspirational labour cannot be used with the exact same meaning as Duffy (2015) uses it in relation to beauty influencers. Even if my respondents in some cases inherit an aspiration of working professionally with books – 5 out of 10 stated that they would like to pursue working with books professionally, or already did – I argue that the main aspiration for my respondents is to indulge in literature: to read and talk to others about their readings. Being a bookfluencer also entails opportunities to come closer to rooms related to literature that have been closed before. Sometimes, these kinds of opportunities can be a motivation for the labour behind writing about gifted books. Miranda describes how consistency and thoroughness may be rewarded with invitations to events, like book breakfasts or release parties. For her, this is enough as payment for her work – to be a part of a bookish community.

The aspiration to put their reading or community first was described by 4 of my respondents as a way of prioritizing and navigating through the collaborators' demands. A majority of my respondents (8 out of 10) elaborated on how they felt the need to recommend books to others even before they started creating content online. Maria had a library where classmates could borrow books. Agnes started writing her book blog when she was 12 years old and was motivated to write three blog posts a week – a discipline that was motivated by her joy of reading and writing. Three of my respondents described a longing for a time before they were a part of the book community, as they would not know about which books were hyped up or feel the pressure to read gifted books. However, the love of reading can be seen as an aspiration behind the content and a guideline to help bookfluencers prioritize their readings.

7.2 To recommend or to review?

The role of expectations from both book publishing companies, other collaborators, and the expectations that bookfluencers have on themselves has been a recurring topic in my interviews. The debate about bookfluencers' roles that is described in section 2.3 introduces the question if bookfluencers should review books in the same way as book critics. This section deals with how bookfluencers negotiate their role in relation to the

idea of the book critic and how they define their work. What is the difference between reviewing and recommending books?

The collaborations with the bookfluencer community can be seen as a result of a changing media landscape. Johanna started book blogging 2009. She describes how book publishers were more restrictive to give books to bloggers at first. But when book reviews in the press were declining, the publishers realized that book bloggers wrote good reviews, were initiated, and engaged and they began seeing bloggers as equivalent to press. Johanna argues that especially children's and adolescent's literature had little visibility in press, and that was her expertise. What can be seen from what Johanna describes is how traditional media started to deprioritize literary criticism, which may be a consequence of financial cutbacks. Book publishers had to find new ways to reach out with their books. However, the difference in reaching out to a literary critic and a bookfluencer is that traditional book critics are paid for their work by the newspaper they post for, while bookfluencers are not paid by their platform. I interpret that 6 of my respondents were clearer in defining their content creation as a hobby. However, the relationships and the (experienced or explicit) expectations from book publishers and other collaborators may affect the hobby to become a form of volunteering – or unpaid labour.

At first, Johanna was flattered by the gifts, and she felt the need to read and write about all the books, even books that she was not interested in. By the time when Instagram became what can be seen as the most important channel for the book community, she also started to receive more books. She experienced how publishers started to appreciate photos of books more – a review was not as important as nice pictures. They could post the book without having to read it, just post a picture when you received it. With the emergence of Instagram stories, it was easier to post quickly about received books. Johanna states that it was then that “bokpost” (translation, M.J: book mail) gained popularity. She posted all the books to her stories to feel like she had given something back to the book publishing companies – it can be seen as a form of entrepreneurial brand devotion, as it is a way to keep a good relationship with the publishers. But when she was offered the job to give book recommendations on Go'kväll, she started to receive around 20 books a week, compared to the five books a week she received before. She realized that she had to stop posting bokpost, since it was too much work:

Men sen så insåg jag att "varför ska jag lägga upp allting som de skickar. Nu är jag mer en reklamplats för förlagen än att jag har kontroll".

Translation, M.J: But then I realized "why should I post everything I receive. Now it is more like I am an advertising space for the publishing companies rather than me having control" (Johanna, personal communication, February 23, 2023).

As Johanna familiarized herself more with the industry, she realized that the publishers did not expect her to post everything. But the expectations from the collaborators can be vague. Sofia argues that many bookfluencers may not know what is expected of them when they receive a book. She argues that the book publishing companies cannot demand or expect bookfluencers to write about the books, as they are not paid.

I interpret that 8 out of 10 of the respondents described how they implemented strategies on how they would relate to their gifted content. A common strategy, that Lina describes, is to treat review copies and spontaneous gifts differently. Review copies are sent to bookfluencers after they have been asked if they are interested in reading it, or if the bookfluencer asks for the book. Thus, it is customary to review it. On the other hand, there is no must to review spontaneous gifts, which the bookfluencer has not accepted in the same way. Miranda and Rasmus use the word contract to refer to the way in which they relate to review copies – by saying yes to the book, they commit to an unwritten contract of reviewing it. The juridical and business-oriented vocabulary shows how the affective relationship between publisher and bookfluencer becomes instrumental and shows the entrepreneurial devotion to the brands. I argue that my interviews connect to Marcel Mauss' (1925/2016) theories on gift giving, as the will to reciprocate the gifts from publishers or authors can be seen as a way of positioning themselves as not morally inferior. An interpretation can be that, even if book publishers hold more economic and cultural capital, affective labour can be a way for bookfluencers not accepting the role of just being the receiver and the moral inferiority that comes with it. However, we can further connect it to a modern perspective provided by Quintin Bradley (2012), who argues that "an economy of reciprocity" (p. 18) enables neoliberal governing, and that unpaid labour is at the center of it. Reciprocity becomes marketized in our modern world and may complicate our relationships of giving and receiving gifts.

The affective labour of bookfluencers' collaborations is constantly present. It means that bookfluencers need to be vigilant in the way they express themselves, especially about books that they do not like – to not lose their contacts to book publishers. It touches the topic of honesty, which connects to narratives of authenticity and realness. To be honest in their book content is important for bookfluencers, as a way of being perceived as authentic and competent by followers. 8 out of 10 of my respondents elaborate on the topic that honesty, reliability, or being genuine is important for them as a bookfluencer. But full honesty may not always be valued by book publishers, if it entails negative publicity.

Sofia posted a negative review, which resulted in that the publisher of the book stopped sending her their publications. She argues that this kind of treatment from publishers works against honesty in the community, as some bookfluencers write overly positive reviews to keep a good relationship with the publishing companies:

Jag tycker att det blir väldigt fel om det blir en positiv marknadsföring – en positiv gratis marknadsföring – för förlagen för att de som recenserar är rädda [...]. I tidningsrecensioner är det sällan så, för de är inte så beroende av förlagskontakterna. Eller, det är väl mer ett ömsesidigt beroende.

Translation, M.J.: I think it is very wrong if there is positive marketing – free positive marketing – for the publishing companies just because the people who review are scared [...]. That is seldom the case in newspaper reviews, they are not as dependent on the contacts to the publishers. Or rather, there is more of an interdependence (Sofia, personal communication, March 15, 2023).

Sofia's statement reveals how the situation of bookfluencers can be seen as more precarious in relation to the book publishers than book critics in traditional media. A book critic from a newspaper has the support of the employer and an acknowledged platform. It may mean that book publishers want to keep a good relationship with literary critics, in order to get featured more in the newspaper. A bookfluencer's platform is merely the social media platform, which is not organized the same way as a workplace. Bookfluencers work individually and without a security net, and publishing companies can quit their collaboration without much consequence and work with someone else if they are unhappy. A good relationship with book publishers may also entail an important network that can help the bookfluencer who would like to work with books. Their labour as bookfluencers is often unpaid, but there can be an aspiration to

use their book content as a way of getting a foot into the field, which makes it a form of aspirational labour. It makes them vulnerable in relation to the publishing companies, as it can be seen as them holding the key to a future career.

An aspect that may complicate bookfluencers being paid for their content can also be seen in relation to traditional literary critics. Literary critics are paid by their platform, bookfluencers are not. An alternative is that publishing companies pay them for creating content about books. But it entails the dilemma that it can be difficult to share an honest opinion, when you are financially compensated by the company that the books come from. Four of my respondents have experiences of paid sponsorships with publishers. Maria gets paid for writing blogpost reviews for a publisher and Alva also has experience of creating paid content from publishers. Pernilla and Lina have been sponsored by a book subscription service from a publishing company. Maria and Alva argue that they still experience themselves as honest, and the process does not differ much from their usual content. Lina argues that she got to write what she wanted but had to send it to a proof-reader before publishing. Pernilla felt ambivalent, as she did not like that her reading became a product or having demands on her reading.

How do bookfluencers define their practice? All my respondents argued that they would currently define themselves as “boktipsare” (translation, M.J.: book recommenders) instead of “bokrecensenter” (translation, M.J.: book critics). They saw their practice more like recommending books than reviewing them. It can be seen as they view book recommendations as focusing more on personal experience and why you would like to read a book, while a literary criticism perspective is to analyse the work and give an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses in a stricter form. Book recommendations may be more eager to share the experience, to persuade others to read the book, or to find the right reader for a book. I interpret that a possible reason for my respondents to not position themselves as literary critics may be that they experienced that reviews contained more formal criteria that they would not fulfil in their content. Sofia argues that reviews contain a deeper analysis and aspects like contexts or comparing the book with other texts. I argue that a book recommender can also work to encourage the joy of

reading in another way and emphasize positive feelings about books. The recommendations can be described as highlighting experience, while criticism emphasizes form.

Connecting to the topic, one could also argue that book recommendations are more focused on personal feelings while literary criticism, as Felski (2020) also claims, has been seen as trying to be objective and detached. However, I argue that bookfluencers positioning themselves as book recommenders can be seen as a form of affective labour. Book recommendations tend to be evaluations of books that are appreciated by the reader – they are easier to consume, without negativity that may upset publishers or authors. To share a more personal evaluation of the book can be interpreted as a way of avoiding being criticized of not following the review as a form – or to not have enough expertise in the literary field. However, in that case, the positioning as book recommenders may also affect bookfluencers negatively, as their competence may not be as relied on as literary critics. Lastly, affective labour can also be connected to how recommending can be seen as inherently social, as it is clearly directed to a recipient, while a review is focused on evaluating the work.

As mentioned, book critics can be seen as more formal in the way they review books, expressing – what can be seen as – a more emotionally detached assessment of the book. The focus might be form, language or intertextuality. Bookfluencers may follow these criteria too, but what differs is the affective relationship between bookfluencer and follower. A bookfluencer can be more personal about how their own taste or background impacts their book content. Detachment is not the end goal. Book criticism and bookfluencing are both forms of affective labour. However, I argue that bookfluencers are more explicit in how they use and manipulate affects in their content in their relation to a clear recipient. The gendered aspects of affective labour may be a possible reason why book criticism is paid, while bookfluencers are not – as book criticism has been labelled as affectively detached.

7.3 Book content and attunement

Our openness to works of literature and our will to indulge in them can be affected by many different factors. The process of being gifted a book can affect the reading experience.

I asked my respondents to share a memory of a gifted book and to tell me which gifted book that they liked the most. Interestingly enough, the stories often focused on the packaging and receiving of the book, rather than the content of the book. Positive memories of gifts include receiving a thoughtful and personalised package. The book can be wrapped beautifully or include presents that fits the theme of the book. A written greeting from the author is highly appreciated, especially if its personalized, using the name of the bookfluencer. Rasmus experienced how certain genres are more likely to include other products than books in their gifts. He mentions feelgood literature (a book genre coined in Sweden which focuses on books that evokes a warm feeling in its reader) and romance literature. Examples of gifts can be chocolate or tea. It may be motivated by how these gifts fit the plot of these genres more, as they focus on cosy everyday life in a different way than other kinds of popular literature (crime novels or fantasy). It may be a way to make readers attune to the story, to connect other senses to it to create a more sensory experience.

Gifts that connect to the plot of the gifted books were in general appreciated by my respondents. However, I cannot draw any conclusions that it made my respondents like the books more when reading them, even if they described it as a positive experience. Johanna states that if a book was very carefully packaged, she would get it as a form of hint that the book publisher really would like her to share a picture of the packaging in her content. She would carefully open the package, and if the book seems like something for her, then she would like to share it. It connects to affective labour as she needs to guess what publishers expect from her. The different forms of gifts that accompany the gifted book can be seen as part its work-net. There are processes around the book that may change how the bookfluencers experience and interprets it.

Another important connection to attunement is temporality. Time and the experience of it affects how we are affected by works of art. Johanna states that “en bok är inte som

vilken vara som helst” (translation, M.J.: “a book is not like any other commodity”, Johanna, personal communication, February 23, 2023). Lina and Pernilla also elaborate on the same topic. Pernilla says that she heard this statement in *En förbannad pod*, the book podcast Sofia had with her friend Katarina. The comparison focuses on the affordances of books in relation to other commodities, like makeup, clothes or home décor. Selling a book requires more from the influencer, since a book entails a greater investment of time. The follower may buy a lipstick, try it, and realize that the colour does not look good – the time investment can be seen as not as big as with a book. It also takes more time to create content about books, since reading is a time-consuming activity. Because reading is more time-consuming, the respondents argue that a bookfluencer generally needs to be more trusted by their audience to influence them to consume.

Another interesting factor is financial compensation for the time that is spent. Sofia says that her podcast was once an ambassador for a book award – who paid them for their work, which she described as positive. She experienced the wage as good in the book industry. However, she also elaborated that the gig may have been underpaid in relation to the same amount of work for her regular job. For bookfluencers to actually read the book is important for the collaborators – the bookfluencer needs to familiarize themselves – attune – with the book to create content about their opinions and feelings about it, which will influence the audience to read it. This is a form of affective labour, as it is a manipulation of affects within a capitalist society. But despite the work being appreciated by collaborators, the influencers are not paid for their hours of work. In conclusion, I argue that attunement is not always seen as worth paying for, despite that it may be one of the more useful ways of inspiring other people to attune to the same work.

Another factor that affected the bookfluencers’ attunements to books was stress. A common experience for my respondents was the focus on new books. 8 out of 10 of my respondents elaborate on that there is an emphasis on new books in the book publishing industry.

I asked them if a consequence could be that they experience a gap where they have not read books that are not new or not classics – books that the publishing companies are

not as eager to send as gifts. 6 of my respondents agreed to the statement. Two of my respondents long for a time when they could find a book in the library without knowing anything about it or caring about if it is hyped up or not. A recurring statement was that the lifetime of a book within the publishing world is short, which 5 of my respondents elaborated on. Reading becomes affective labour when bookfluencers need to adapt it to marketing. The work-net of the gifted book for bookfluencers implies for them to adapt their reading; their pace and how they are aware of how their opinions of a book can affect their status in the community. This will be discussed more in chapter 8.1.

7.4 Main findings

This section summarizes the main findings of the analysis chapter.

The first section's (7.1) main findings are that the gendered aspects of the book community and the history of affective labour can be seen as a possible reason why bookfluencers are not paid for the labour. Moreover, bookfluencers with a secure employment outside of the book industry or prioritizing their reading as a hobby may prevent stress and enable them to negotiate their collaborations. Thus, reading as an aspiration behind the content gives bookfluencers a certain power to prioritize, despite demands from collaborators. However, the aspiration to be a part of a book community can also mean wanting to keep a good relationship with collaborators, to be invited to new literary rooms that have been closed for them before.

The second section (7.2) shows that the respondents see themselves more as book recommenders than literary critics. Bookfluencers do not have the same form of security net in form of the employment as a literary critic has. Instead, they just have their social media platforms, where they are positioned more as individuals when they have to negotiate collaborations with for example book publishers. They invent strategies as a way of handling the expectations of the collaborators. But the expectation of doing a good job in order to reciprocate the gift is present. In a larger perspective, it can be connected to reciprocity in the form of unpaid labour as an enabler of the neoliberal system (Bradley, 2012). It complicates giving and receiving gifts in our neoliberal capitalist society. Furthermore, the view on literary criticism as more emotionally detached and book recommendations as more personal and emotional may mean that

bookfluencers are more connected to affective labour. In turn, the gendered history of affective labour may imply that it can be a reason why bookfluencers' labour is unpaid, while literary criticism is paid.

The third section (7.3) provides insight to how the reading experience of bookfluencers is affected by being gifted books by collaborators. It shows how the temporal aspects makes creating content about books differ from creating content about other products – books require more time for attunement. Thus, a bookfluencer's labour of creating content about a gifted product takes more time. It may also mean that bookfluencers need to be trusted more by their audience in order for them to buy a book, as a book requires more time from a consumer to attune to and form an opinion of it. Another aspect to temporality is newness, which is prioritized within the book industry. The urge to stay relevant or to meet expectations from collaborators can affect the bookfluencers' reading experiences. The need to adapt the reading and their content to the market can be seen as a form of affective labour.

8 Discussion and concluding remarks

The interviews with the bookfluencers resulted in a multifaceted view of their experiences creating content about gifted books. In this chapter, the analysis is discussed with some concluding remarks.

The first section of this chapter discusses what the implications of being gifted a book are for the bookfluencers' reading experience. The second chapter focuses on the bookfluencers' ability to imagine the future of paid labour and the social media platforms' part in this. Lastly, I describe relevant future research that can be connected to this study.

8.1 The work-net of the gifted book

As my analysis shows, being gifted a book can have implications on the reading experience. Felski's (2020) concept of the work-net shows how many different aspects around the work and within the work affect our experiences and attachments to it. Being

gifted a book is no exception. For both literary critics and bookfluencers, it comes with frameworks to follow.

The review copy comes with expectations, for both literary critics and bookfluencers. A common expectation for both of them is that the publishers would like them to read the book. But this expectation differs for the two groups. An example of controversies in Swedish literary criticism in traditional media is when the author Kristian Lundberg wrote a negative review of a book that was not published, which resulted in him losing his freelance work in writing literary criticism (Torgny, 2006). The aftermath of this is described in his autobiographical proletarian novel *Yarden* (Lundberg, 2009). As Johanna elaborated, Instagram as a social media platform made publishers emphasize the visual aspects of book content more. It may encourage bookfluencers to post content about books even when they have not read them yet. However, I interpret my interviews that none of my respondents would like to create content about books they would not read. 8 out of 10 of my respondents also elaborated on their strategies of review copies and spontaneous gifts, where review copies were prioritized readings. The work-net for gifted books can be seen as similar for bookfluencers and literary critics in the way that the reading experience is encouraged by someone else, not just the reader themselves.

But while a literary critic sees being critical as part of the profession, some of my respondents experienced how their honesty was not appreciated. Four of my respondents experienced that books got overall positive reviews in the community. The will to keep a good relationship with book publishers and authors could be a reason for bookfluencers to not be critical – as they want to continue the collaboration. It can be seen as a form of entrepreneurial brand devotion, as influencers adapt their content to fit the book publishing companies they want to work with. Forced positive experiences of books may overall affect the reading of the book to be stressful and ingenuine.

On one hand, 4 out of 10 of my respondents elaborated on how they needed to remind themselves that their joy of reading is their priority, to be less stressed about being gifted books and the expectations of publishers or authors. On the other hand, bookfluencers also described finding books in the mailbox as something that made them genuinely happy. The idea of finding a new book – and that the book may be an amazing reading experience – was described as one of the perks of receiving gifted

books. The negative aspects seem to mostly connect to the (experienced or real) expectations from the actors who gave them the book – and the affective labour of keeping a good relationship with them.

Another aspect, that 8 out of 10 of my respondents mentioned, was the emphasis on new books. In addition that it can be stressful to create content while the book is still relevant, there are also other aspects about the newness of the book that may affect the reading processes. As the theoretical framework of Felski (2020) shows, interpretations and readings of books are not made in a vacuum. One of my respondents argued that they would like to wait a while before reading a book if they were not sure if they would like it, in order to wait and see what their friends in the community would say. Another one said that if a new book was hyped up, they would instead wait some time to be able to make their own interpretation of it. To follow the pace of the book market and only read new books can be seen as a form of entrepreneurial brand devotion, to brand yourself as liking only new books to keep a good relationship with book publishers and to stay relevant in the community. Newness can be seen as a part of a gifted book's work-net. But that is also the stress bookfluencers experience.

8.2 The future of bookfluencers

A relevant question in relation to my topic is what the future labour of bookfluencers will look like. The conversations with the bookfluencers about their love for books – and how many of them see their content as a hobby – can imply that the question of their unpaid labour is not important. Like Pernilla elaborates, we can ask the question if everything needs to be commodified? Why cannot love for literature just flow in these spaces, without it being seen as anything other than leisure?

I argue that the capitalist environment on the social media platforms works against the notion of book content not being a form of labour. It complicates the idea of the activity on the platforms to be seen as pure leisure. By consistently posting about books on the platforms, bookfluencers makes other people stay on them – the platforms become living and interesting spaces to come back to. The companies behind the platforms

profit on it. It connects to how unpaid labour is a central part of neoliberal capitalism (Bradley, 2012).

Bookfluencers' reading and creating content about books take hours of work. The platforms they use then profit on their work, while the bookfluencers are not paid for it. In turn, other actors exploit bookfluencers' precarious being on the platform with their expectations of bookfluencers working for them for free too. It shows the relevance of my topic and why it is important to continue studying unpaid labour on the platforms. Especially labour carried out by bookfluencers and other content creators who are passionate about their work. David B Nieborg and Thomas Poell (2018, p. 4277) state: "As cultural production is becoming increasingly platform dependent, the autonomy and economic sustainability of particular forms of cultural production is increasingly compromised". Bookfluencers can be seen as depending on being on the platforms to be a part of the community. The platforms as gatekeepers in creative industries is described in Tiziano Bonini and Alessandro Gandini's (2019) article on the music industry, where they state that the algorithms of the platforms can have gatekeeping tendencies.

I asked my respondents how they would imagine a way in which they would be paid for their work. The idea that the social media platforms would pay them was not an alternative that my respondents experienced as probable. Instead, they focused mainly on how their content creation can be a way to get other forms of paid gigs. It is interesting how not getting paid for work on the platforms is so normalized.

"Platformization" can be described as the processes in which these kinds of online platforms change the structures in the public or the market – processes that have been seen as entrenched are disrupted and transformed to fit the logic of the platforms (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 19 & 47). It can be seen as the book community that previously might have found each other through book circles or conversations about books in a local community, now find likeminded people on the platforms. The conversations can be seen as moving away from the physical space to social media platforms.

However, I also see in my interviews how my respondents describe a need to discuss books outside of social media. It can even be a motivation to increase their visibility on the platforms – to have a chance of being invited to book related closed rooms – like events. Ironically, the wish to figure the platforms out – and their gatekeeping principles

– can be motivated by the aspiration to impress the gatekeepers in the book industry. An aspect that has not been explored in the thesis is how the affordances of the platforms affect how bookfluencers relate to their content. Algorithms were briefly mentioned in some of my interviews and how they entailed an uncertainty to the content creation.

Living our lives on the platforms, engaging, and affecting each other in different ways can be seen as the affective labour that makes the platforms go round. Because of that, we should not doubt our power to make a change and question the platform companies' authority.

8.3 Suggestions for future research

Bookfluencers is a quite unexplored topic, which means many possible interesting topics for future research. As mentioned in the previous section, studies on bookfluencers and platforms can be a relevant topic: social media platforms, but also platforms for streaming of audio books or eBooks. How do bookfluencers navigate through the precarious conditions of social media platforms and how do streaming platforms affect their reading?

Another topic that would make a good topic for future research is the aspect of representation within the bookfluencer community. My respondents shared many interesting analyses on the subject, but sadly I could not fit these into this thesis, in relation to the aim of the study.

Lastly, this thesis explores the topic of gifted literature from the perspective of bookfluencers. Thus, relevant future research could be to focus on the perspective of the gift givers – book publishers and authors – and their motivations behind giving gifts.

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10 Appendix

10.1 List of questions for respondents

- *Skulle du definiera dig själv som en influencer?*
(Translation M.J.: Would you define yourself as an influencer?).
- *Kan du försörja dig på det du lägger ut i sociala medier?*
(Translation M.J.: Can you support yourself financially with the content you post on social media?)
- *Lägger du någonsin ut sponsrat innehåll på sociala medier, alltså rena reklamsamarbeten?*
(Translation M.J.: Do you ever post sponsored content on social media, that is pure advertisement collaborations?)
- *Om du skulle uppskatta hur många paket du får hem per månad, hur många tror du att du får hem?*
(Translation M.J.: If you would estimate how many parcels you receive each month, how many do you think it would be?)
- *Vad gör att du dras till just bokcommunityt på sociala medier?*
(Translation M.J.: What makes you drawn to the book community on social media?)
- *Känner du dig tvungen att alltid posta på dina sociala medier om böckerna du får från förlagen?*

(Translation M.J.: Do you feel obligated to post about the books you get from the book publishing companies on your social media?)

- *Känner du att du behöver posta om en bok du fått av förlagen om du gillar den?*
(Translation M.J.: Do you feel that you need to post about a book that you have received from the book publishing companies if you like it?)
- *Följer bokförlagen dig på sociala medier?*
(Translation M.J.: Do the book publishing companies follow you on social media?)
- *Tycker du att bokförlagen är medvetna om vilka slags böcker och genrer som du gillar?*
(Translation M.J.: Do you think that the book publishing companies are aware of what kind of books and genres you like?)
- *Har du någonsin fått en bok skickad till dig som du känt negativa känslor kring direkt? Varför?*
(Translation M.J.: Have you ever been sent a book that you have felt negative feelings for immediately? Why?)
- *Vad gör du med de böcker du får som du inte läser?*
(Translation M.J.: What do you do with the books that you receive but do not read?)
- *Finns det någon typ av bok som du inte vill få hemskickad?*
(Translation M.J.: Is there any type of book that you would not like to be gifted?)
- *Känner du dig någonsin stressad att läsa nya böcker som du fått hemskickade till dig för att kunna posta om dem? Och om du känner så, upplever du då att det påverkar om du gillar boken och om du känner dig "redo" för den?*

(Translation M.J.: Do you ever feel stressed to read new books that get sent to you to be able to post about them? And if you do, do you experience that it affects if you like the book and if you feel “ready” for it?)

- *Har du någonsin känt att du har behovet att vänta en tid innan du läser en bok du fått av förlagen?*

(Translation M.J.: Have you ever felt the need to wait some time before you read a book that you got from the book publishing companies?)

- *Uppskattar du att få böcker hemskickade från förlagen?*

(Translation M.J.: Do you appreciate receiving books from the book publishing companies?)

- *Hur upplever du att representationen och mångfalden är inom böckerna du får hemskickade/bokcommunityt?*

(Translation M.J.: How do you experience the representation and the diversity within the books you are gifted/the book community?)

- *Uppllever du att du ofta får böcker hemskickade med karaktärer som liknar dig själv?*

(Translation M.J.: Do you experience that you often get gifted books with characters that are similar to yourself?)

- *Vilken är din favorit av dina hemskickade böcker, och vad fick dig att gilla den?*

(Translation M.J.: Which is your favourite of your gifted books, and what made you like it?)

- *Finns det något minne av ett paket som du fått hemskickat som du skulle vilja dela med dig av?*

(Translation M.J.: Are there any memories of parcels that got sent to you that you would like to share?)

- *Hur tror du att ditt content skulle påverkas av om du bara skulle göra sponsrat innehåll?*
(Translation M.J.: How you think your content would change if you just posted sponsored content?)
- *Tror du att bokcommunityt online har förändrat din bokkonsumtion på något sätt?*
(Translation M.J.: Do you think the book community online has changed your book consumption in some way?)
- *Tror du att din bokkonsumtion har ändrats något av att få böcker hemskickade till dig?*
Translation M.J.: Do you think your book consumption has changed due to being gifted books?